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ABSTRACT

This digest offers community college academic leaders a synopsis of the key components necessary for building a successful developmental education instructional framework. Specific emphasis is placed on program structure, faculty, and program improvement. Developmental education is defined as "courses or services provided for the purpose of helping underprepared college students attain their academic goals." According to the research summarized in this document, exemplary developmental education programs operate within established instructional environments where value and high expectations for positive student outcomes take precedence. The author discusses the merits of centralized developmental education programs and provides insights regarding the characteristics of decentralized programs that are able to achieve "a coherent philosophy of teaching" and effective organizational structures. Specifically, the research highlights the importance of leadership, the articulation of common goals, and the integration of developmental courses. The strength of developmental education teaching has also been identified as essential to improving student outcomes. However, only a minority of community colleges require their developmental education faculty to have specific training in this field. Professional development for faculty is one strategy for addressing the issue of instructional quality. (RC)

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Digest

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Building an Instructional Framework for Effective Community College Developmental Education

By Caroline Q. Sheldon

Research reveals that exemplary developmental education programs operate within established instructional environments where value and high expectations for positive student outcomes take precedence (Boylan, 2002; Roueche & Roueche, 1999). In spite of these findings, the majority of community colleges offer fragmented developmental education programs (Shults, 2000). In order to flourish, community college developmental education, defined in this context as "courses or services provided for the purpose of helping underprepared college students attain their academic goals," (Boylan, 2002, p. 3) requires college presidents, trustees, and chief academic officers to play a central role in creating the instructional framework conducive to successful developmental education outcomes. These high-level administrators foster a culture of success by insisting that faculty, staff, and students endeavor to meet institutional expectations in developmental education. In their studies of exemplary practices, both Boylan (2002) and Roueche and Roueche (1999) concluded that positive student outcomes were more likely to be achieved when institutional leaders established high standards for success, expected everyone involved in the developmental education effort to strive toward achieving program goals, as well as created the opportunity for success by crafting the instructional framework most beneficial to student outcomes.

An effective developmental education instructional framework necessitates that community colleges adopt a philosophy of practice shared by institutional stakeholders across instructional boundaries. Research by Grubb (2001) supports the idea of directed, coordinated developmental education programs rather than reliance on "individual and idiosyncratic efforts" to achieve institutional outcomes (p. 2). This digest offers community college academic leaders a synopsis of the key components necessary for building an instructional framework advantageous to a successful developmental education effort. Specific emphasis is placed on program structure, faculty, and program improvement. Although vital, the consideration of the full range of programs, services, and approaches impacting student outcomes in developmental education, including assessment and placement of students, "bridge" courses linking developmental course content with college level subjects, limitations on developmental student credit hour loads, counseling, and instructional support services is beyond the scope of this digest.

Structuring for Success: Program Leadership and Coordination

Although centralization of developmental education under one academic unit has been identified as a feature of most exemplary developmental education programs, it is not a prerequisite to success (Boylan, 2002). The benefits of a centralized program can still be achieved within the decentralized developmental education structure that characterizes the majority of community colleges as long as there is a shared, "coherent philosophy" of teaching developmental education (Grubb, 2001, p.2). Critical to the establishment of a coherent philosophy of teaching and the effectiveness of the decentralized structure is "coordination of developmental courses and services by an administrator with primary responsibility for campus-wide developmental education" (Boylan, 2002, p. 11). For the decentralized model to be effective, someone must be sanctioned to coordinate the program across instructional boundaries in accordance with teaching philosophy and institutional expectations. Without an effective and accountable leader, a decentralized program is likely to have a mediocre impact. Boylan (2002) identifies the following additional traits particular to successful, highly coordinated developmental education programs:

- regular meetings of all those involved in the delivery of developmental courses and services,
- articulation of common goals and objectives for all developmental courses and services, and
- integration of developmental courses and academic support services.

Building a Committed Faculty

First and foremost, exemplary community college developmental education programs utilize faculty with a demonstrated commitment to the value of developmental education in general and developmental students in particular. In *High Stakes High Performance: Making Remedial Education Work* (1999), John and Suanne Roueche argue that the success of developmental students is predicated upon "faculty attitude and competence" (p. 26). Research by Boylan (2002) and Cooke (1998) also associates negative attitudes of faculty toward developmental education and students with poor developmental program outcomes. For community college developmental education to be successful, it is critical that faculty have a clear understanding and commitment to the philosophy and objectives of developmental education championed by the institution. Best practice institutions assign faculty to developmental education courses after they have been oriented to the institutional philosophy of teaching developmental education and institutional expectations for student outcomes such as successful completion of courses, progression through the developmental curriculum, and the achievement of individual student academic goals (Boylan, 2002).

The strength of developmental education teaching has also been identified as essential to improved student outcomes in developmental education programs. However, only a minority

of community colleges require their developmental education faculty, part-time or full-time, to have training specific to teaching developmental education prior to instructing developmental students (Shults, 2000). Indeed, the prerequisite for teaching in most community colleges is a master's degree in an academic discipline (Cohen & Brawer, 2002).

Community colleges can build a faculty committed to developmental education through hiring practices and on-the-job training opportunities for new and existing faculty. When able to hire new instructors, community colleges committed to developmental education place a high priority on hiring faculty with specific training and experience in developmental instruction (Boylan, 2002). Because many of the faculty who teach developmental education are part-time instructors (Shults, 2000), it is critical that hiring practices, for both part-time and full-time faculty, reflect the institution's commitment to developmental education (Roueche & Roueche, 1999). Exemplary developmental education programs in the community college emphasize "significant classroom experience and a broad repertoire of teaching techniques" when hiring faculty to teach developmental education (Roueche & Roueche, 1999, p. 26).

Professional development for faculty is one way colleges not in a position to hire new faculty, or unable to find faculty with significant classroom developmental education experience, can achieve parity with colleges employing more experienced developmental education instructors. Based on his review of the research, Boylan (2002) states that professional development should include training designed to provide experience with and exposure to a variety of developmental education teaching strategies, such as mastery learning, collaborative learning, small group work, and classroom assessment techniques. A study conducted by the Massachusetts Community College Developmental Education Committee identified continuous training opportunities for faculty as a program characteristic correlated with student success (Lizotte, 1998). Faculty at exemplary institutions are also encouraged to (1) join professional organizations specifically dealing with the instruction of developmental education students and (2) share teaching techniques, strategies, and classroom assessment practices (Roueche & Roueche, 1999). Boylan (2002) states that in best practice institutions, in-service training is provided to all faculty, including part-timers, so that they can meet institutional expectations for developmental education. And, exemplary developmental education programs are dedicated to the discipline of instruction within the context of developmental education and support instruction as a profession.

Program Improvement through Systematic Evaluation

Faculty and staff at exemplary developmental education programs not only keep informed regarding the latest research-based best practices in developmental education, but manage program improvement through comprehensive, systematic program evaluation that includes both formative evaluation measures designed to improve program quality and summative evaluation measures aimed at assessing program impact and outcomes (Boylan, 2002; Roueche & Roueche, 1999). Previous research indicates that formative evaluation is an essential part of the evaluation process in community college developmental education because it represents faculty and staff commitment to a continuous quality improvement effort (Boylan, 2002). Maximally effective developmental education programs regularly schedule program evaluation activities that include measurements of program effort, such as the number of courses offered, short-term outcomes, such as successful course completion rates, and long-term outcomes, such as graduation rates and grade point averages (Boylan, Bonham, White, & George, 2000).

Conclusion

The open access mission of community colleges guarantees that community colleges will serve more developmental students in future years. How well community colleges serve these students and achieve improved institutional outcomes in developmental education will depend upon the instructional framework within which community colleges offer developmental education programs and services. Based upon a review of the literature concerning exemplary practices in developmental education programs, it seems important that community college leaders dedicate resources to creating the environment and authority to coordinate decentralized programs; assemble, train, and develop a cadre of dedicated faculty; and evaluate and continuously improve the developmental education effort. Such a directed effort is likely to result in greater progress toward improving outcomes for students, programs, and ultimately, institutions.

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